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VILA RECÔNCAVO

[The Usina]

Financially the two units--factory and plantation--are run separately. One set of books is kept for the agricultural part, and one set for the factory. The six plantations combined produced eighteen thousand tons of cane in 1950, although they had planned on twenty-three thousand. The fall in the expected harvest was due to several things. First, less new cane was planted, because of the activities of the petroleum workers who were invading the cane fields of the factory and drilling oil wells. (The first time a field is cut, the percentage of cane is higher than that obtained by cuts during the next four or five years. The same amount of land, therefore, will produce more cane if it is replanted regularly. The factory, however, deemed it wiser to be content with the older plantings for one year because of the oil workers' invasion, for newly planted cane is more subject to damage than an established field.) Second, during that year there was a serious drought which affected adversely the growth of sugar cane. There is no irrigation in the Recôncavo, and during the drought seasons which come periodically a partial crop loss nearly always occurs. In addition one entire taboleiro caught fire and burned to the ground, causing the loss of many tons of cane.

The agricultural cycle and the work on a plantation may be divided into two broad epochs, summer and winter. Summer is the busiest season, for it is harvest time and all hands are occupied, including the migrant workers. The cutters with their machetes cut an average of three to four tons a day apiece, which must be quickly loaded and carried to the factory and milled, for the longer the lapse of time between the two operations, the greater the loss of sugar content. After a field has been cut, one of two things occurs. If it is to be turned into pasture, it is fenced, and the draft animals are turned loose in it. Otherwise the leaves which were cut from the top of the plant and left lying on the ground are burned, and within a short time the roots start sending up new shoots. This old planting (soca) each year gives a decreased yield. As a rule a field is cut and burned three to four years before being turned into pasture. In the days of the old plantations, when the soil was more vigorous, cane of twelve years was considered "new cane." Now, however, the yield is so decreased by the increasing poverty of the soil that three to four years is the best, depending upon the amount of rain. During the summer, if land is prepared and there are prospects of heavy showers, "summer plantings" may be made. They are never as good as those done in the winter, for the sun frequently